

ABOUT BOOKS

Thank You India

By Roberta Anderson
Published by the author;
printed by Jagadamba Press,
Kathmandu, Nepal

\$25 softcover; \$20 e-book

When 69-year-old seasoned traveler Roberta Anderson touched down in India two years ago, she planned to stay a month, visiting a few old friends and business associates before returning to her home in Polson.

But in the small town of Puttaparthi, “a simple twist of fate” transformed her month-long sojourn into seven months – six spent bedridden and in a wheelchair. She became “a virtual renunciate,” confined to a narrow bed in a small room by a broken femur that she managed to break again just five weeks into her recuperation.

“All my familiar life props were abruptly jerked away,” she writes in *Thank You India*, “leaving nothing but three nighties, four bedpans, one pair of earrings, an iPad, and a few basic art supplies.”

Fortunately, her sense of humor and curiosity also seemed intact as she began to adjust to her new landscape. “It slowly occurred to me that I was being offered an unexpected gift in a weird disguise.”

The watercolor pencils she had tossed in her suitcase were put to work creating more than 130 drawings – many reproduced in her book. Her life also entwined with that of her neighbors, a family from Varanasi whose son, Laddu, urgently needed heart surgery – available for free at the same hospital that twice repaired Anderson’s shattered femur. She began to teach the two-year-old boy English while his mother prepared nourishing ayurvedic meals for the convalescents.

A veritable stream of family and friends found their way to her bedside, and thanks to her iPad, Anderson’s daily posts inspired and entertained her large community of Facebook friends.

As she healed, she began to find ways to give back. Rural India, she writes, “often seemed like an enormous bleeding wound with no bandages.”

In addition to helping Laddu receive his essential heart surgery, she raised funds to provide medical help for needy villages and for the local Happy Home orphanage, which cares for more than 40 street children in Puttaparthi (The book can only be purchased at thankyouindiabook.com and all proceeds from book sales go to the orphanage).

The plucky narrator ultimately pulls off that age-old trick of turning lemons to lemonade. Her inspiring tale, and the drawings that accompany it, are a testament to the power of art-making, perseverance and a buoyant spirit.

– Kristi Niemeyer



Balefire

By Shann Ray
Published in February 2014 by Lost Horse
Press, Sandpoint, ID
\$18 softcover

In poems bare and supple, Montana native Shann Ray revisits territory from his collection of short stories, *American Masculine*, and turns fresh earth in *Balefire*.

“The Family Who Lived With Their Faces to the Sky” and “East of the Bear’s Paw Mountains, North of Milk River” feel like bones that became stories (or are they stories, stripped naked?). In one, a father’s violence brings his son’s death; in the other, a boy finds his father’s body, frozen on a fence line, killed by his own bullet. His mother tells him, “Your father saw the world darkly./ And people darker still./ Find the good, boy.”

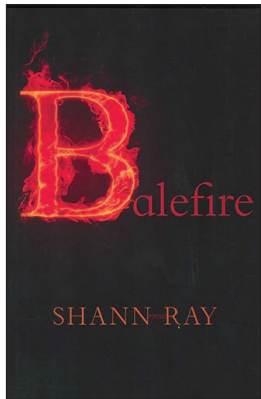
The three poems in “The Violence Elegies” describe the bloodlust and brutality of bar fights, “... the sound/ of the face when it breaks.” “The Suicide Elegies” follow a woman as she sinks beneath the weight of her life, “her own tears like dark rivers/ running out from her forever.”

But there’s plenty of lift and quickening here too, as in “Montana”: ... This is the gift/ God gives, we said,/ and did not doubt/ how the wilderness/ throws its arms on our necks,/ our children asleep/ in their beds./ Black Mountain on the sky behind you.”

“One senses always the poet’s tender regard for family as well as the forces of nature that flesh, flame, and fray each human relationship,” writes former Montana Poet Laureate Sandra Alcosser of the collection.

Ray spent part of his childhood on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation and now lives in Spokane, where he teaches leadership and forgiveness studies at Gonzaga University. *American Masculine* won the Bakeless Prize, the High Plains Book Award and the American Book Award.

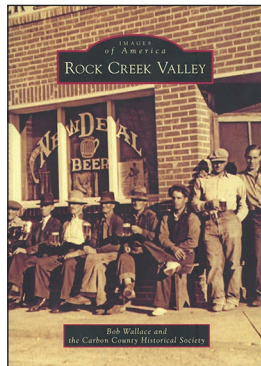
– Kristi Niemeyer



Rock Creek Valley: Images of America
By Bob Wallace and the Carbon County Historical Society
Published 2013 by Arcadia Publishing,
Charleston, SC
\$21.99 softcover

Rock Creek originates high in the magnificent Beartooth Plateau and flows north to eventually join the Clark’s Fork of the Yellowstone River. This entry into the “Images of America” series is devoted to the area in south-central Montana where it flows, which includes the communities of Red Lodge, Roberts and Joliet.

The introduction gives a concise overview of the area’s geography, history of Native American inhabitants, the advance of fur traders and explorers, and the establishment of several small towns populated with railroad employees, miners and farmers.



The broad valley served as a convenient passage for area stagecoaches traveling from Rawlins, WY, to Billings. This route served as a link between the Union Pacific Railroad and the Northern Pacific line, opening the valley for settlement and later for transporting coal.

With the completion of the spectacular Beartooth Highway in 1936, the town of Red Lodge “established itself as a traveler’s gateway to the unspoiled wilderness of the Beartooth Mountains and Yellowstone.”

The book is generously illustrated with black and white photographs of agricultural workers, railroad scenes, school children, churches, businesses and holiday parades. The caption on a photograph of the Carbon County Bank notes that the Sundance Kid, Kid Curry and the Wild Bunch botched a robbery of the bank in 1897. The caption on an image of the notorious “Liver Eating” Johnston reveals that he homesteaded south of Red Lodge around 1897.

Wallace is a journalist, and worked with the Carbon County Historical Society and numerous individuals who contributed photographs and anecdotes to make this book possible.

– Judy Shafter

Badlands: a Collection of Stories

By Thomas Biel
Published 2013 by Three Towers Press, HenschelHAUS Publishing, Milwaukee, WI
\$14.95 softcover

Montana native Thomas Biel’s collection of short stories, all set in the fictional town of Riverside, are infused with the urgency and unpredictability of adolescence.

Matthew, the teenage narrator and son of a Presbyterian minister struggling with his faith, recounts coming of age in a town “that sits on the edge of the vast apron of badlands,” where he discovers that life “is lived between the smooth bones of death.”

But for Matthew, and his best friend, Idaho Wells, it’s life lived at a full and often amoral throttle. “I had a heart that could be as dry as the sun-baked hills,” Matthew says. “I did not know that to be a real Christian required a good heart and acts of kindness.”

They coax an unsuspecting classmate to drink urine, disguised as Mountain Dew; slaughter a baby rabbit with their first BB guns; stage a shocking resurrection on Easter Sunday; use the minister’s telescope to spy on a neighbor woman as she’s undressing; and try to bomb Gertie Blue’s garden with homemade firecracker grenades.

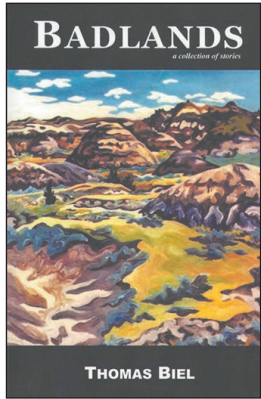
Gertie, the retired badlands librarian, becomes friend and mentor, extracting revenge for their garden raids by expanding the two boys’ reading repertoire. When diagnosed with cancer, she insists the two teenagers escort her join her on an LSD-laced trip to Makoshika State Park – “the starkest, the most naked of land.”

Love, sex, religion, and death – big questions, all – lurk beneath the surface of Biel’s playful and poignant tales of angst and shenanigans. His father is a kind man, questioning God; his brother avoids the draft by fleeing to Canada; his spurned admirer, Monica Rose, devours so many rose petals in the church choir loft that she has to have her stomach pumped; and his charismatic best friend, Idaho, is “half moth, half coyote.”

Biel was born in Sidney and graduated from Dawson County High School in Glendive, The University of Montana in Missoula and the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley. He taught English at high schools in Whitehall and Libby, Costa Rica and Ecuador before landing in Milwaukee, where he teaches at a large public school. He’s also the author of four plays.

Helena artist Dale Beckman’s painting adorns the cover of *Badlands*.

– Kristi Niemeyer



The Apprentices

By Maile Meloy
Published 2013 by G. P. Putnam’s Sons, New York, NY
\$16.99 hardcover

Helena-raised author Maile Meloy picks up threads left dangling in her first young-adult novel, *The Apothecary*, and knits them deftly into a second tale of suspense and adventure.

Young heroine Janie Scott is booted out of an exclusive boarding school in New Hampshire on trumped up charges of cheating on a math exam. At the same time, her desalination experiment disappears from the school chemistry lab, and then Janie disappears too, kidnapped by the ruthless and rich father of her roommate.

Fortunately, resourceful friends are on her trail: Benjamin, the son of a British apothecary, has invented a powder that helps him communicate with Janie from the other side of the world, where he and his father are tending to wounded civilians in a jungle war.

He knows Janie is in trouble, and asks their old pal Pip, a skillful pick-pocket who has found his way into the movies, to check up on her. The three fearless friends eventually converge on a remote island in Malaya, but it’s a treacherous journey for each.

Janie winds up caged in a uranium mine; and after Benjamin takes a potion that turns him into a skylark, he’s thrown off course by a cyclone and held hostage by suspicious islanders. Meanwhile, the insouciant Pip coaxes a millionaire and his daughter to fly him to Malaya by promising them a tropical vacation.

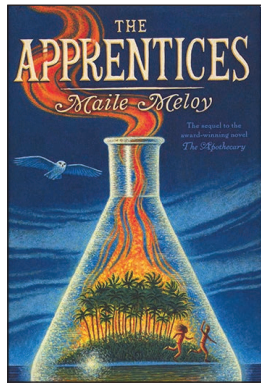
But why is Janie in danger? Who wants to trap her alchemist friends, who are striving to save the world from nuclear weapons?

Friends and enemies collide in this roller-coaster ride of a book, riddled with intrigue and peopled with inspiring protagonists and creepy villains. As in *The Apothecary*, Meloy doesn’t flinch from disturbing nuggets of history; this time, it’s the ravages of a fledgling war in Vietnam and the Japanese occupation of China during World War II.

“Thrilling,” writes author Ann Patchett of *The Apprentices*. “The characters may know magic, but it’s their courage and resourcefulness that save the day.”

Meloy has also written two short-story collections and the novels *Liars and Saints* and *A Family Daughter*.

– Kristi Niemeyer



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Send us book ideas

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Please send book proposals to: Acquisitions, PO Box 5630, Helena, MT 59604. Include a self-addressed, stamped envelope or your materials will not be returned, and do not send original art or photographs. For more information, visit www.farcountrypress.com.

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